

Social benefits of local sport events: a multiple case study

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Sport events not only provide opportunities for economic or urban development, but also for local community development (Misener & Mason, 2006). According to Taks (2013) especially smaller non-mega sport events (NMSEs) may be relevant for creating social benefits for host communities, when compared to the often researched global mega sport events (MSEs). Constructs like social capital offer an important theoretical paradigm for understanding how NMSEs built community networks and relationships (Misener & Mason, 2006). Because many more NMSEs are being organized all over the world than MSEs, more knowledge on how these events can be socially leveraged (Chalip, 2006) for community benefits can potentially contribute to local communities.

In this study a multiple case study (Yin, 2013) is conducted in the northern part of the Netherlands assessing five NMSEs (three running, one walking and one cycling event). The social impact is assessed using a mixed-methods methodology to create stronger inferences (Van der Roest, Spaaij & Van Bottenburg, 2015) in assessing the social impact and evaluating the process of social leverage strategies contributing to this impact. Questionnaires evaluating perceptions of participants (n=1.289), visitors and inhabitants (n=463) of the impact of these events on social capital, cohesion, participation, pride, identity and well-being (Bull & Lovell, 2007; Heere et al., 2013) were carried out. Interviews with organizers and local stakeholders gave insight in the used leverage strategies and process. Qualitative and quantitative data on both social impact and social leverage are integrated and interpreted.

The NMSEs are valued highly by the participants, visitors and local community, although some events within the multiple case study are more successful than others. According to most respondents these NMSEs foster social capital, cohesion and identity. Many respondents are proud of these local events and their participants. Especially the events that create liminality (Chalip, 2006) and local support are valued highly for their local contributions. Some strategies and conditions for NMSEs organizers to develop social impact will be presented at the conference.

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